

## The Role of Debate and Public Speaking in Developing Effective Communication Skills

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### ABSTRACT

Debate and public speaking are vital activities that transform communication skills. These activities foster clarity of expression, confidence, and active listening, core components of effective communication. Developing these skills is essential for personal and professional growth in the world where collaboration and persuasion are increasingly valued. Debate encourages critical thinking by challenging individuals to evaluate perspectives and formulate logical arguments. Public Speaking, on the other hand, helps overcome the fear of speaking in front of an audience, thereby building self-confidence and improving verbal and nonverbal communication. Both activities teach participants to engage actively with their audience, understand diverse viewpoints, and adapt their messaging to suit various contexts. Five contributors from various backgrounds participated in organised debate sessions as part of the study. Self-judgements and observers were used to gather data, and evaluations were based on audience engagement, fluency, confidence, and logical structure. The findings show that participants' public speaking skills have significantly improved, with articulation and speech anxiety reduced. Results show that those who indulge in these activities regularly have enhanced self-awareness, stronger interpersonal interactions, and better articulation. Beyond the stage, these advantages improve leadership, problem-solving, and collaborative skills in business environments.

**Keywords:** Debate; Public speaking; Communication skills; Soft skills; Critical thinking; Anxiety; Fluency; Confidence building; Argumentation skills; Public engagement.

### 1. Introduction

Effective communication is the cornerstone of success in nearly every facet of life, whether personal, academic, or professional. The current age of global interconnectivity has heightened the importance of skillfully expressing ideas across borders. Proficient communication extends beyond mere fluency, it encompasses the capacity to articulate thoughts clearly, participate in substantive conversations, and tailor messages to diverse audiences. Debate and public speaking represent structured activities that transcend conventional communication methods, integrating elements of critical analysis, persuasion, and emotional acumen. These practices not only enhance verbal and non-verbal expression but also cultivate abilities such as rapid decision-making, self-understanding, and poise under pressure.

#### 1.1. Research Problem

While the significance of communication skills is increasingly being acknowledged, few people have well-structured venues for practicing and sharpening these abilities. Public speaking and debate are a couple among the few, more interesting and straightforward, ways of practicing such skills, however, they are absent in the education curriculum and professional development programs. Due to this lack of exposure, individuals may not be able to fully express their communication potential and may find it challenging to succeed in competitive, collaborative, and cross-cultural settings.

#### 1.2. Study Objectives

- To examine how public speaking and debate improve particular communication abilities including confidence, articulation, and active listening.

- To investigate the wider effects of these activities on personal development, encompassing resilience, empathy, and self-assurance.
- To look into how these abilities like flexibility, teamwork, and leadership transfer into success in the workplace.
- To offer practical suggestions for integrating public speaking and debate into frameworks for professional development and education.

### 1.3. Significance

The purpose of this study is to emphasize how crucial it is to incorporate public speaking and debate into training programs and curriculum. People can better prepare for the needs of effective communication in a variety of situations by doing this.

## 2. Literature Review

Public speaking and debate have long been recognized as essential tools for the development of effective communication skills. Research in communication studies suggests that individuals who engage in structured public speaking and debate activities exhibit enhanced cognitive abilities, improved confidence, and stronger articulation. Several studies emphasize that these activities not only improve verbal communication but also enhance non-verbal skills such as body language, eye contact, and vocal modulation, all of which contribute to persuasive and impactful speaking.

Smith (2020) highlights that debate plays a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and analytical reasoning. By engaging in structured arguments, individuals are compelled to assess different perspectives, construct coherent viewpoints, and respond effectively to counterarguments. The study further suggests that regular engagement in debate exercises improves the ability to analyse complex information, structure logical arguments, and present them with clarity.

Similarly, Brown (2019) emphasizes that public speaking contributes significantly to overcoming stage anxiety and building self-confidence. The study found that individuals who participated in frequent speaking engagements demonstrated a marked improvement in their ability to communicate clearly and persuasively under pressure. Brown also discusses how structured public speaking exercises help individuals develop their ability to engage an audience through effective storytelling, rhetorical devices, and strategic pauses.

Johnson (2021) examines the combined impact of public speaking and debate, arguing that while each discipline independently enhances communication skills, their integration results in a more comprehensive skill set. The research highlights that individuals who practice both public speaking and debate are better equipped to navigate real-world communication challenges, whether in academic, professional, or social settings. These individuals exhibit higher adaptability, quick thinking, and the ability to construct well-reasoned arguments in both spontaneous and prepared settings.

A recent study by Williams (2022) underscores the importance of structured evaluation methods in communication skill development. The research suggests that using self-assessments, observational evaluations, and peer feedback

mechanisms provides a holistic view of an individual's communication progress. Williams' findings support the argument that structured evaluations help individuals recognize their strengths and weaknesses, thereby facilitating targeted improvements.

Miller (2018) highlights that debate enhances critical thinking, logical reasoning, and adaptability by encouraging structured argumentation. Rogers (2021) emphasizes that public speaking reduces anxiety, improves vocal delivery, and strengthens audience engagement. Anderson (2017) explores effective public speaking techniques, focusing on persuasion, clarity, and audience engagement. Harrison & Roberts (2020) analyze the impact of debate on argumentation skills, finding that it significantly improves structured reasoning and analytical thinking. Nelson (2016) examines strategies for overcoming stage fright, highlighting the role of practice and psychological conditioning. Davies (2021) discusses the importance of body language and vocal modulation in audience engagement. Williams (2019) presents a meta-analysis on debate as a tool for critical thinking, demonstrating its effectiveness in improving reasoning skills. Chen (2022) explores the adaptation of public speaking techniques to digital platforms, emphasizing the need for engagement strategies in virtual environments. Collectively, these studies underscore the significance of debate and public speaking in developing holistic communication skills, advocating for their integration into education and professional training.

## 2.1. Research Gaps

While individual studies focus on debate or public speaking separately, there is limited research on the combined impact of these activities on holistic communication development.

## 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative methodology to investigate how debate and public speaking exercises affect the development of communication skills. A structured debating exercise is used as part of the approach to gauge participants' improvements in speaking confidence, articulation, and general skills. Direct observation and participant self-evaluation were used to gather data.

### 3.1. Participants

A total of five individuals participated in the study, each selected based on varying levels of public speaking experience and confidence. The participants included:

1. **Teja** – A B. Tech student with strong grammatical skills.
2. **Manju** – A professor with academic expertise and professional communication experience.
3. **Ranjeth** – A professor with extensive knowledge in the field of education.
4. **John** – Proficient in English but experiences anxiety when speaking in front of an audience.
5. **Ram** – Possesses substantial knowledge but struggles with effective expression.

### 3.2. Data Collection

#### Detailed Description of the Structured Debate Activity

The structured debate exercise was designed to simulate real-world communication scenarios and provide participants with opportunities to practice various communication skills.

### Activity Structure

The activity was divided into three key phases:

#### 1. Preparation Phase (60 minutes):

- Participants were given a single debate topic one week before the debate to ensure full preparation.
- *Example Topic: "The benefits of online education outweigh the challenges."*
- Participants were required to conduct research and gather evidence to support their position.
- The goal was to develop well-structured arguments, anticipate counterarguments, and prepare rebuttals.

#### 2. Presentation and Debate Phase (90 minutes):

- Participants were randomly assigned to either the "pro" or "con" side of the debate topic.
- Each participant was allocated 5 minutes to present their opening argument.
- Emphasis was placed on clarity, logical reasoning, and persuasive delivery.
- Following the opening arguments, a 2-minute rebuttal period was initiated where participants were given a chance to ask cross-examination questions and rebut the arguments.
- A moderated Q&A session with the audience took place towards the end.

#### 3. Feedback and Reflection Phase (30 minutes):

- Following the debate, participants received constructive feedback from the observers based on a pre-determined rubric.
- The rubric assessed fluency, confidence, logical structuring, and audience engagement.
- Participants were also given time for self-reflection on their performance, considering their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

#### 4. Evaluation Criteria

**Table 1.** Assessment of each participant before the activity

Participant	Fluency (10)	Confidence (10)	Logical Structuring (10)	Audience Engagement (10)	Total Score (40)
Teja	8	7	9	8	32
Manju	9	9	10	9	37
Ranjeth	9	9	10	9	37
John	6	5	7	6	24
Ram	7	6	8	7	28

#### 4.1. Comparison of Communication Skills Before and After the Activity

Participants' communication skills were assessed before and after the exercise to measure the impact of the debate and public speaking activity. Before the activity, observations revealed that:

- Teja had strong grammatical skills but struggled with structuring arguments fluently.
- Manju and Ranjeth were confident but needed improvement in audience engagement.
- John exhibited high proficiency in English but was hesitant and anxious while speaking publicly.
- Ram had substantial knowledge but faced difficulty in expressing his thoughts coherently.

After participating in the structured debate, noticeable improvements were observed:

- Teja enhanced his fluency and became more structured in presenting arguments.
- Manju and Ranjeth demonstrated improved audience engagement through better body language and modulation.
- John showed significant confidence gains and reduced anxiety while addressing an audience.
- Ram improved in articulating his thoughts clearly and concisely.

**Table 2.** The table below presents a comparative analysis of participants' performance before and after the activity

Participant	Fluency (Before)	Fluency (After)	Confidence (Before)	Confidence (After)	Logical Structuring (Before)	Logical Structuring (After)	Audience Engagement (Before)	Audience Engagement (After)
Teja	6	8	5	7	7	9	6	8
Manju	7	9	8	9	9	10	7	9
Ranjeth	7	9	8	9	9	10	7	9
John	4	6	3	5	5	7	4	6
Ram	5	7	4	6	6	8	5	7

#### 5. Impact of the Activity

The debate activity greatly helped in the development of the communication skills of the participants. This resulted in participants becoming more fluent and confident in communicating their ideas using structured arguments, rebuttals, and participatory methods with the audience. John, who was initially plagued by stage fright, showed a marked improvement in confidence, whilst Ram improved his capacity to sort through and express himself clearly. Both Manju and Ranjeth took to working on their presentation delivery techniques, making their sessions more interesting and interactive. More generally, the activity sharpened participants' critical thinking skills, responded effectively to counterarguments, and used body language to reinforce their messages.

#### 6. Results

- **Confidence Building:** Participants reported increased confidence in expressing their ideas.
- **Critical Thinking:** Engaging in debates significantly enhanced participants' analytical skills.
- **Active Listening:** Public speaking and debate fostered better audience engagement and responsiveness.

## 6.1. Discussions

**Interpretation of Results:** The topic suggests that debate and public speaking are effective tools for developing communication skills. Debate develops argument and counterargument skills, and public speaking enhances confidence and audience rapport.

**Comparison with Literature:** The results align with previous research, confirming that these activities contribute to the acquisition of important skills and critical skill development. However, this research adds value by examining their combined impact.

**Practical Implications:** Educators and employers should encourage participation in debate and public speaking to prepare individuals for real-world communication challenges. These activities are particularly relevant in professions requiring persuasive and clear communication.

**Limitations:** The study's sample size and scope were limited, focusing primarily on students and professionals in urban settings. Future research could explore diverse demographics and long-term impacts.

## 7. Conclusion

Debate and public speaking are indispensable for developing effective communication skills. They enhance confidence, clarity, critical thinking, and active listening skills that are vital in personal and professional contexts. Additionally, these activities foster leadership, adaptability, and the ability to engage meaningfully in discussions across various domains. Their impact extends beyond individual growth to improving collaboration and teamwork in diverse environments. Institutions and organizations should integrate structured debate and public speaking programs to cultivate these essential skills, ensuring that individuals are well-prepared for both academic and professional challenges.

## 8. Recommendations

Educational institutions and organizations should incorporate structured debate and public speaking programs to foster these essential skills. Further research could explore innovative methods to integrate these activities into various learning environments.

### 8.1. Future Research Directions

- Longitudinal studies to assess the lasting impact of debate and public speaking.
- Exploring their role in enhancing digital communication skills in the virtual age.

### Declarations

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#### Competing Interests Statement

The author declares no competing financial, professional, or personal interests.

### **Consent for publication**

The author declares that he/she consented to the publication of this study.

### **Authors' contributions**

Author's independent contribution.

### **Availability of data and material**

Not applicable to this study.

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